

This paper will trace the development of policy and legislation within the context of age since 1945. Social policy refers to the articles laid out by the government in response to our need for social protection within our welfare state. (Spicker 2018) When we consider age in our society we define it as individual humans, categorized into groups and for this paper, we are considering children and young adults. We will examine the impact of raising the school leaving age from sixteen to eighteen, how implementing that policy has affected that age group. In linking age with social policy we can begin to unpick some of the theory, policy and practice being considered.

Social policy can be defined in several ways, being viewed as a way to recognise and deal with social problems (Manning, 1998, p.31) aiming to identify and find ways of reducing inequalities in access to services and support between social groups defined by socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, migration status, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age, and between countries. (The London School of Economics And Political Science, 2008) and (Cardiff University) describe social policy as the academic study of societies response to need and promoting well-being there in. The university goes on to say that the study of social policy gives us a critical understanding of what social justice consists of, how we make decisions in whose and what needs are most significant and how we manage social services whilst considering human need. Social policy addresses how states and societies respond to global challenges of social, democratic and economic change.

(Angus Erskine, 1998, p17) states that the most common approach to social policy Britain is the concentration on the big five social services. These are listed as social security, housing, health, social work and education. In nineteen forty five The Beveridge Report was implemented by a new labour government. The report though commissioned by the conservatives during the war, was integral in the implementation of the welfare state as it is now known. He addressed what he believed to be the main five social evils. Idleness or laziness in that people were living in absolute poverty due to high unemployment levels, disease because medicine was expensive and society suffered more with ill health. Ignorance due to a lack of education passed the age of fourteen, squalor due to poor housing and families sharing rooms and want as too many people were living far beneath the poverty line . (BBC 2014). The government responded to the lack of basic services highlighted and began to take a greater responsibility for its citizens.

‘This included the establishment of a National Health Service in 1948 with free medical treatment for all. A national system of benefits was also introduced to provide 'social security' so that the population would be protected from the 'cradle to the grave'. (BBC 2014)

The principles of the National Health Service were simple, its creator Aneurin Bevan stipulated that it would be paid for with taxes, the richer paying more, the poorer paying less. Secondly, everyone was entitled to its services, and thirdly that it would remain free. It is not that long ago that we did not have free to all health services; it meant that instead of relying on charity and homemade herbal potions, everyone could be prescribed medication or have access to treatment. (NHS). In terms of financial change, Prime Minister Atlee's Government decided a pot of money would be generated by wage earners called national insurance. This would build up enough reserves in principle to pay out benefits to those injured, unwell or temporarily unemployed and supply a basic amount of pension at the end of a working life. The money was deducted automatically from wages and the system designed to ensure society had enough to survive. There were also benefits for the families, children, financial support in the event of death, allowances for orphaned children, benefits for getting married and to help with the costs of raising children. An extensive and far reaching benefits system. (Open University, 2006).

At the time of the Second World War armistice, the legal school leaving age was 15. This had been implemented by the education act of 1944 (1945 in Scotland) and children would be allotted an appropriate secondary school place dependant of their 11 plus exam result. Sir William Spens in 1938 had recommended that three categories of school be established, grammar, secondary modern and technical, and this it hoped would provide “equal opportunities for children of all backgrounds” (Parliament UK).

In 1972 the age was increased to sixteen and at this point, it meant about a third of pupils, who would have previously left, stayed in school. (BBC). This change came about because the government believed British educational standards were below world averages. The results were strategically analysed and despite being extremely controversial the plan was hailed a success as children appeared to do better in government tests and more children went on to further education. An insightful look into how policy comes about is started In 2006 when the government decided it was worth considering another increase in the school leaving

age and in 2007 began a consultation. (politics.co.uk). The policy process in most instances begins with a social issue or public problem. Government officials and experts in the field will come together to discuss and strategise addressing the problem. Then the policy makers agree on a solution and create legislation and rules. At this point, the policy is implemented to society and it begins to shape a new way or adopt new ideas to create change. (Appiah-Kubi (2015). This was exactly what the government set out to achieve, They undertook evaluations, case studies, youth summits, and youth councils to aid the decision making process and included politicians, voluntary sector youth groups, local council representatives and private sector organisations. (Department for Education 2015) In 2008 (*The Education and Skills Act*) was passed and in England, young people are now obliged to stay within a learning environment until the age of 18. The raising the age of participation policy was implemented in 2013 to encourage and motivate young people, meaning that they have to find a job or volunteering placement with training, an apprenticeship or a school/college place. (Careers Writers Association 2016) Another reason (Deminos 2015) states is in order to keep the Not in Education, Employment or Training, (NEET) statistics down. The term NEET was introduced in the early nineteen nineties and was penned to label the young people who were now not entitled to claim unemployment benefit under the age off eighteen but still needed support and intervention provided for them. (Furlong 2009 p,176). Wales, however, did not participate in this change having been devolved and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) now responsible for educational attainment and school leaving age. The WAG theory being that Wales could watch the policy closely, do things differently but compare results. According to (The office of National statistics 2017) in June 2018, 87% of 16 and 17 year olds in England were in full time education. This seems to indicate that given choice an educational setting is preferential to a work or apprenticeship placement. In Wales (Welsh Government 2018) report a continual further decline in sixteen to eighteen year olds as NEET. This makes it difficult to determine whether England or Wales are leading the way in reducing the unemployment figures due to keeping children educated longer. The impact of less sixteen to eighteen year olds in the workforce is also controversial.

(The U.K. Commission for Employment and Skills 2012) explain that a younger workforce is cost effective, wages are lower, young adults are actively seeking work and so advertising costs are reduced, skills and enthusiasm are quite possibly higher and without family responsibility, flexibility is presumed greater. In Wales, young people are entitled to claim an

Education Maintenance Allowance to encourage a stay in education rather than it being mandatory. This is a cheaper option for welfare and those youngsters claiming Job Seekers Allowance and becoming an unemployed statistic. Will keeping young people out of the job force cost more economically in the long term though? How will it impact well-being? Mental health? The ageing population and their care?

We also need to consider if setting an upper school leaving age limit is equitable, does it need to be universal or could a more individualised policy be implemented? So do our young people have a choice? For the purpose of comparison. In Belgium and Germany, the legal school leaving age is 18, in China 14 and in Canada the age is 16. With regard to The Equality Act 2010 and its listed nine protected characteristics, of which age is one, children and young people are not lawfully protected from age discrimination. Points within the United Nations Convention On The Rights Of A child (1992) state that every child is entitled to education, the intention of said education should aid a child to reach their full potential and yet every child has a right to benefit from social security.

Currently, in England, young adults are being given a choice of pathway but it has its limits. If young people have a right to social security benefits, are allowed to marry, allowed to drive and soon to be allowed to vote then surely they should get more choice here. Indications show that children may be under pressure from carers not wanting to lose benefits (Gov.U.K.), that children will simply disappear statistically and that qualifications will be pointless, destroying job opportunities and resulting in a rise in criminal behaviour. It also places pressure on local councils to identify non participants as mentioned in (Criminalise or 'disappear' the young? No path to a 'Great Meritocracy' centre for crime and justice studies 2016). We can question if young people have contributed enough to the decision to raise the age.

When considering the raise in age it is necessary to discuss what it means in terms of discrimination. Asya Suleymanova (2018) described children as already being discriminated against within the classroom. She says 'For some lost reason, we are sorted into a class by age' and that there is an expectation for your peers to be of the same age. Young people in the work place are commonly discriminated against and victims of ageism. (Young-Powell 2017) states that ageism can and does affect anybody of any age. It doesn't even have to be about actual age and discrimination can occur when someone is perceived as a particular age regardless of accuracy. (Simpson 2015) looks at common ageist experiences in young

people. Staff can be treated differently due to age, younger generations can be described as inexperienced in comparison to older employees, stereotypical language can be used, minimum wage rates can be manipulated and birthdays overlooked in order to under pay. Age discrimination in the workplace is unlawful and the (Citizen's Advice Bureau 2018) advise that there are two distinct types of age discrimination. Direct discrimination is when one is visibly victimised due to age and indirect is more subtle, maybe comments are made, employees feel bullied. (The Community for Equality and Diversity in the U.K. 2018) tell of a groundbreaking case in 2007. Discrimination claims were upheld by the courts and the case won by a twenty year old woman who was fired from her role as a secretary in a private London club. Megan Thomas was defined as being too young to deal with the clientele of the club and dismissed on those grounds. Keeping young people in education/learning longer could eradicate some of these young employee/employer issues.

The next step to address is who is in control of policy making in the future for it is presumably the generation that is currently remaining in education or training longer. There is much debate and controversy at present in deciding whether or not to give sixteen year olds the right to vote to create a chance for young people's empowerment and a choice in shaping their own future (Robb 2007 p101) but it does appear to be the next logical stride in promoting equality and choice in sixteen's and over. Here in Wales, the (Welsh Assembly 2018) commission have granted the Welsh assembly the right to lower the age.

In 2005 an interesting investigation by (The Joseph Rountree Foundation) revisited Sir William Beveridge's five social giants. (Wheeler et al) conclude that in the seventy years since his report was published the U.K. still 'has an obvious and continued unequal distribution of resources and prospects across the country'. Overcrowding in housing is still an issue, although under occupancy is also a problem. Ill health and long term conditions are still prevalent in society. Teacher versus qualifications appears to be a postcode lottery and employment seems to suffer a complete divide dependant on geographical location. Poverty within the evaluation is measured by how many cars a family takes ownership of. This evidence seems to show a definite shift in philosophy, demonstrating that we have moved from a residual (no means of self provision) to a sense of entitlement where welfare and benefits are concerned. (Johns 2011 p37)

In conclusion, it is the government who decide how we best live our lives, how we do what and to what age. The school leaving age has increased slowly over the years and has the opportunity to rise again. However, statistics and research seem to indicate that young people are choosing to stay in a learning environment for longer in both England and Wales. Whether raising the age of compulsory learning again would go unchallenged would prove fascinating. The findings will be interesting, to see the long term effects, the economical implications, and social mobility impact.

Reference list

Alcock, P, and Erskine, A, and May, A. (1998) *The Students Companion to Social policy*. Oxford. Blackwell Publishers.

Appiah-Kubi, K Dr (2015) *Policy Making Process*. Available at; <https://www.acu.ac.uk/publication/download/pdf> (Accessed on 13th of November 2018)

BBC (2014) *The Beveridge Report*. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/intermediate2/history/cradle_to_the_grave/welfare_state/revison/5/

BBC (2014) *WW2 People's War* Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a1143578.shtml> (Accessed on 15th November 2018)

BBC (2014) *William Beveridge (1879 – 1963)* Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/beveridge_william.shtml (Accessed on 12th November 2018)

BBC News (2013) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-21033278> (Accessed on November 12th 2018)

Cardiff University *School of Social Sciences* Available at: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences/courses/undergraduate/social-policy> (Accessed 18th November 2018)

Careers Writers Association (2016) *Parental guidance*. Available at: <http://www.parentalguidance.org.uk/help-information/raising-the-participation-age-rpa> (Accessed on 15th November 2018)

ChartsBin statistics collector team 2009, *Ending Age of Compulsory Education around the World*, Available at: <http://chartsbin.com/view/qpp>> (Accessed on 17th November 2018)

Citizens Advice (2018) *Justifying Age Discrimination At Work* Available at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/discrimination-at-work/what-doesn-t-count-as-discrimination-at-work/justifying-age-discrimination-at-work/> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)

Department of Education (2015) *Government Policy: Young people*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-young-people/2010-to-2015-government-policy-young-people> Accessed on 12th of November 2018

Equality Act 2010, Available at: <http://www.crae.org.uk/media/26308/CRAE-Equality-Act-2010-guide.pdf> (Accessed on 13th November 2018)

Fergusson, R. (2016) *Criminalise or Disappear* Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/criminalise-or-disappear-young-no-path-great-meritocracy> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)

Furlong, A. (2009) *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood*. Oxon. Routledge.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2005 *The relationship between poverty, affluence and area*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-affluence-and-area> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)

Johns, R. (2011) *Social Work, Social Policy and Older People*. Exeter: Learning Matters

Manning, N (1998) *The Students Companion to Social Policy*. Oxford. Blackwell Publishers.

National Assembly for Wales (2018) *Lowering the voting age to 16*. Available at: <https://www.assembly.wales/en/abthome/role-of-assembly-how-it-works/Pages/Voting-Age.aspx> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)

NHS *National Health Service History*. Available at: <http://www.nhshistory.net/shorthistory.htm> (Accessed on 12th November 2018)

Open learn (2016) Available at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/history-science-technology-and-medicine/history-medicine/birth-the-welfare-state/> (Accessed on 12 November 2018)

Office of National Statistics *people, population and community* Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing> Accessed on 15th November 2018

Parliament uk Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/educationact1944/> (Accessed on 12th November 2018)

Politics.co.uk (2004) Available at: <http://www.politics.co.uk/reference/education-leaving-age> (Accessed on 12th November 2018)

Reduction of Neets <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/young-people-not-education-employment-training/?lang=en>

Simpson, S. (2015) *Age Equality* Available at: <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/age-equality-five-examples-discrimination-young-workers> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)

Spicker, P. (2018) *An introduction to Social Policy*. Available at: <http://spicker.uk/social-policy> (Accessed on 01 November 2018).

Suleymanova, A. (2018) *Age discrimination at school*. Available at: <https://medium.com/@mathnomad/age-discrimination-at-school-1a934766c45a> (Accessed 20th November 2018)

The Community for Equality and Diversity in the U.K. (2018) *First successful age discrimination case for being too young*. Available at:

<https://www.diversitylink.co.uk/resources/first-successful-age-discrimination-case-for-being-too-young> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)

The London School of Economics And Political Science (2008) *What is social policy*. Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/social-policy/about-us/What-is-social-policy> (Accessed: 31st October 2018).

U.K. Commission for Employment and Skills 2012. *Why business should recruit young people*. Available at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/13758/1/why-businesses-should-recruit-young-people.pdf> (Accessed on 12th November 2018)

UNICEF CONVENTION 1992

Young-Powell A. (2017) Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2017/apr/27/how-to-protect-yourself-from-ageist-attitudes> (Accessed on November 20th November 2018)